

Why Are You A Christian?

Prayer

Dear Father,

I rejoice in the knowledge that you are my God and Saviour through Jesus Christ, your Son and my friend. I thank you for the comfort of your Word made real to me by your Holy Spirit. Lead me in the way of truth and righteousness for your Name's sake,

Amen.

Song: (MHB 92) *by C Wesley*

1. God of all power, and truth, and grace, which shall from age to age endure,
Whose word, when heaven and earth shall pass, remains and stands for ever sure;
2. That I thy mercy may proclaim, that all mankind thy truth may see,
Hallow thy great and glorious name, and perfect holiness in me.
3. Thy sanctifying Spirit pour, to quench my thirst, and make me clean;
Now, Father, let the gracious shower descend, and make me pure from sin.
4. Purge me from every sinful blot; my idols all be cast aside;
Cleanse me from every sinful thought, from all the filth of self and pride.
5. Give me a new, a perfect heart, from doubt, and fear, and sorrow free;
The mind which was in Christ impart, and let my spirit cleave to thee.
6. O that I now, from sin released, Thy word may to the utmost prove,
Enter into the promised rest, the Canaan of thy perfect love!

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Scripture

- John 18: 33-38A

Message: Why Be A Christian?

Jesus Christ is often and rightly presented as a generous Saviour who freely gives hope where there is no hope, life where there is no life, satisfaction where there is none, purpose where there is no purpose, forgiveness where there is guilt. Those who have entrusted their lives to this Saviour often and regularly testify to having personally experienced these benefits for which they are deeply grateful. Jesus Christ, you will hear, is the life giver. He does give hope and purpose and satisfaction. He forgives. Christians around the world are grateful for all that and are willing to suffer for it. If you are a Christian then you are grateful for that too.

There is, however, something else that is equally important that needs to be clear in the mind of all Christians. And that something is often the greater target of critics of Christianity, particularly those with an atheistic perspective of life. You may have heard or read Richard Dawkins, and others, say that if being a Christian gives you all sorts of benefits

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that you previously did not have, then good for you. He would be happy for you that you are the better for being a Christian. He's heard the testimony of Christians who tell of what Jesus Christ has done for them. He would even acknowledge the benefit that society has experienced because of the influence of Christianity over centuries. But he would be equally happy if similar benefits were claimed as a result of adhering to another religion, or by talking to the gnomes or to fairies or by practicing yoga or worshipping the sun during the summer solstice at Stonehenge. If you find peace and purpose and hope in these things, regardless of whether they are figments of your imagination, regardless of the integrity of the claims; if you find peace and purpose and hope in them then good for you and he might encourage you to continue with it.

In other words, for some, the value of a belief system is based only on the consequences of those beliefs, whether real or imagined. If the consequences are good, then keep believing. If the consequences are not so good, then perhaps consider more effective options. But the reason the Richard Dawkins of the world won't go along with the Christian's belief system is because they refuse to accept that the *causa prima*¹ of the Christian faith (the God of the Bible as revealed in Jesus Christ) is true. They would claim instead that not only is the claimed *causa prima* false, but that the same or similar benefits are better gained through rational thinking, science and technology, secular ethics and education.

So the testimony of the Christian who gladly tells of the lifechanging benefits that have been experienced, as good as that may be, does not always carry the weight of persuasion that one might hope for. The great evangelists understood this. John Wesley wrote of "enforcing the commands of Christ"²; his *causa prima* was what Paul refers to as the Law of Christ³. Billy Graham consistently declared "The Bible says ..."; his *causa prima* was the Bible itself.

It is imperative for the Christian to understand the integrity of the Gospel message; that it is based on absolute truth and to have confidence in its integrity. Jesus understood the importance of this. He emphasized the integrity of his message several times. He said he did not speak on his own authority, but on the authority of God the Father⁴. He claimed before Pilate to bear witness to the truth⁵. John tells us that Jesus came "full of grace and truth" and that "truth came through Jesus Christ"⁶. Jesus said that he was the embodiment of truth⁷ and that God's word is truth⁸. He said that when you accept his word, you will know the truth⁹. He claimed to speak the truth¹⁰. And that the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth"¹¹. The author of John's gospel wanted us to understand that what he wrote and

¹ Primary reason, starting point, basic assumption

² Letter on Preaching Christ by Rev. John Wesley, LONDON, December 20, 1751 <https://onemethodist.org/02-10.htm>

³ Galatians 6:2

⁴ John 14:1

⁵ John 18:37-38

⁶ John 1:14, 17

⁷ John 14:6

⁸ John 17:17

⁹ John 8:31-32

¹⁰ John 8:45, 16:7

¹¹ John 15:26, 16:13 and 1 John 4:6, 5:6

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therefore what we read, is true¹². “Truth” and “true” appear over and over again in the Scriptures from beginning to end.

Therefore I suggest that the *prima causa* for being a Christian is not its benefits, as substantial as they are, but that the message itself and its author are both, in every respect, true. Is this not why Paul says that “no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ¹³? The reason Jesus Christ is such a good and unique foundation for life is because He is the embodiment of truth.

Let’s look at the life of a man we’ll call Henry. Henry is not a Christian, and hasn’t thought much about God – he sees no reason to do so. His life is in pretty good shape, and by that I mean he’s healthy, he has a satisfying job that pays enough to keep the bread on the table, there’s peace in the home – his wife really is his best friend –, he has good friends to hang out with and he gets on well with his children. Life is comfortable, the Crows are winning and the future looks OK. For such a person, where’s the appeal if all that Jesus offers is what he has already. Now let’s acknowledge the objections. Yes, the best of what the world has to offer is a only a shadow of what God offers, and yes, there is a complete failure to understand the commandments of God, especially number one, and yes that despite everything, the heart still remains desperately wicked before a holy God, and yes everything can be taken away in an instant. But from Henry’s perspective, all is well, so why should he bother with the Christian message, with the Bible, with church or with Jesus Christ?

What we are saying today is that there is a very good reason why Henry should bother with the Christian message, with the Bible, with church and with Jesus Christ. And that is that the Gospel, and the words and person of Jesus in particular are fundamentally and rock solid true.

To turn again to that conversation between Jesus and Pilate. It could be re-stated something like this:

Pilate: “I don’t know why you’ve been brought to me. Do you know?”

Jesus: “I have a kingdom which is outside of this world.”

Pilate: “Really? Are you telling me that you’re a king?”

Jesus: “Yes! And the reason I came into *this* world was to reveal Truth.”

Pilate: “Truth? Does such a thing even exist?”

Pilate posited a question that many would repeat today if they thought about it. Is there such a thing as Absolute Truth?

Many would answer that question with reference to the realm of mathematics and science and say “yes”. The Law of Gravity is always true. Nothing can be colder than -273°C (0°K). Arithmetic is rock solid reliable: 3+2 is always 5. These things are true absolutely.

¹² John 19:35

¹³ 1 Cor 3:11

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Then if the topic shifts to morality and behaviour, the claim of absoluteness, while still present, becomes less emphatic. So most would agree that honesty is the best policy, morally right, but, hey, there are probably exceptions.

But when the discussion moves to the spiritual and supernatural, there is no consensus about what is true, other than the meaningless “if it’s true for you”.

So Pilate asks the question “What is truth?” It is of course ironic that Pilate should ask this question of Jesus.

One could speculate that this question was itself the subject of vigorous debate in such places as the Acropolis, and that Pilate was repeating what he had heard was hotly debated amongst the philosophers of the day. But, as we know, having asked the question he didn’t wait for an answer! One can only speculate what answer Jesus might have given, noting that he didn’t answer any of Herod’s questions.

What Jesus did say to Pilate is “I have come to testify to the truth.” He follows that with “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” People who are interested in truth, who are “on the side of truth” will listen to Jesus. Always have done.

People who choose to accept that Jesus not only spoke the truth but was also the embodiment, the personification of truth, are then able to claim “I am a Christian because the Gospel is true” rather than “I am a Christian because of the amazing benefits I have received”. This I would suggest provides a firmer foundation (1 Cor 3:11 again) because whatever the consequences of that choice, whether they are as one might have hoped for or otherwise, the *causa prima* remains unmoved.

The acceptance of the truth of the Gospel and of the person of Jesus also has profound ramifications. It means that everything Jesus said is absolutely true. And he said some extraordinary things and some pretty difficult things. Even the disciples struggled with some of the things he said¹⁴. Some of those difficult sayings of Jesus need to be researched deeply because, despite their challenges, they are true. And the acceptance of Jesus speaking and being truth leads on to more than just what Jesus said. It necessarily leads to what Scripture has to say about Jesus as also being true: the virgin birth, the miracles, the resurrection, ascension and his return and of course who he is. And more.

Jesus is Truth. The Gospel is true. Choosing to accept that is life changing. It has to be.

Prayer for suffering Christians, from *Barnabas Prayer*

Three Iranian Christian converts from Islam have received prison sentences on charges of “propaganda activities” concerning their involvement in “house churches”. 37 y.o. Narges Nasri, who at the time of her sentencing was four months pregnant, was sentenced to 16 years. Abbas Soori, 48, received a sentence of 15 years; Mehran Saloumi, 37, received a sentence of 11 years 8 months. All



Narges Nasri

¹⁴ “This is a hard saying.” Many of his disciples no longer walked with him (John 6:60, 66)

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three were given heavy fines. Pray for Narges, Abbas and Mehran as they face these long sentences. Ask that they will all know God's comfort and strength as they endure trials. Pray that lawyers representing them will receive God's sovereign guidance in seeking to overturn these harsh verdicts.

Hymn: by Jack Hayford

1. He came to earth to live, He came to earth to live for me
He came to earth to live Christ Jesus the Son of God
2. He lived without one sin ...
Christ Jesus the Son of Man.
3. He healed and spoke the truth ...
Christ Jesus the Word of God.
4. He died upon the cross ...
Christ Jesus the Lamb of God.
5. He rose up from the dead ...
Christ Jesus the Lord of Lords.
6. He's coming back again ...
Christ Jesus the King of Kings.

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Benediction:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA